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TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [KPAO](#) [TW](#)
SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S.-TAIWAN RELATIONS

¶1. Summary: Amid extensive reporting May 10 that a KMT hopeful will drop out of the party primary for the year-end Taipei mayoral race, Taiwan newspaper coverage also focused on President Chen Shui-bian's press briefing in Costa Rica Tuesday, his transit plans, exchanges of greeting with U.S. First Lady Laura Bush, and local political issues. The pro-independence "Liberty Times," Taiwan's biggest daily, ran a banner headline on page two that read: "Bian: It Will Do Both Sides Good Not to Transit the United States." The pro-status quo "China Times" also ran a banner headline on page three that said: "Return Trip Will Transit a Non-ally in South America."

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, a "Liberty Times" news analysis urged Taiwan to put aside the transit uproar and find again common interests with the United States. A "Liberty Times" opinion piece, however, condemned the U.S. State Department for making humiliating transit offers to Chen. An editorial in the limited-circulation, pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" said the Taiwan people should feel saddened and humiliated that Chen's humble request for transit stops in the U.S. was rejected. A separate "Taipei Times" commentary urged Taiwan to rethink its diplomatic orientation and go its own way. An editorial in the pro-unification "United Daily News" said Chen is the one who was most badly hurt by the transit incident, and that a majority of Taiwan's people will not hate the United States just because of Chen's provocative remarks. A separate "United Daily News" opinion piece speculated Chen may use more provocative remarks or behavior to challenge Bush and Chinese President Hu Jintao in the next two years. A "China Times" opinion piece said Taipei-Washington relations are walking a tight rope. An editorial in the limited-circulation, conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" urged Chen not to incessantly strain Taipei's relations with the United States by pursuing pro-independence policies. End summary.

A) "Waving Good-bye to Transit Uproar and Trying to Find Common Interests Again"

Washington correspondent Nadia Tsao noted in a news analysis in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 600,000] (5/10):

"... An isolated Taiwan has no more important ally in the international community than the United States. No matter if it's about security, economic, political, or even NGO aspects, U.S. support is closely related to Taiwan's survival. Taiwan has zero resources in swinging between the United States and China and hedging its bets like other Asian countries do. The United States should understand that in an international climate where the significance of transit diplomacy is twisted and often exaggerated in Taiwan, the Taiwan leader's displeasure [with the U.S. transit offers] has its reasons. Even though there may be conflicts of

interests between the two sides, Taiwan's leaders still have the responsibility to seek common ground between Taiwan and the United States and not give up the dialogue [with Washington]."

B) "Disgraceful U.S. State Department"

Cao Changqing, a China-born freelance journalist based in the U.S., opined in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 600,000] (5/10):

"President Chen Shui-bian is about to conclude his visit to Central and South America and return to Taiwan tomorrow. The fact that Chen's transit sites during this visit hit one snag after another was widely reported in the media. It has also aroused the Taiwan people's anger because the terms offered by the U.S. State Department for Chen's transits were almost humiliating to Taiwan. ... Chen's decision not to transit the United States is a right choice that maintains Taiwan's dignity. ... Whenever necessary, the Taiwan people must cry out aloud their protests to let this world that lacks morality hear their voices."

C) "Transit Saga No Cause for Celebration"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (5/10):

"... The U.S. offer of transit stops in Anchorage, Alaska, or Honolulu, Hawaii, amounted to a slap in the face. While both are lovely cities, they are not part of the US mainland, nor are they considered political or economic centers. And even in these outlying cities, Chen was only given permission for a five-hour stopover, ruling out the possibility of the president conducting any meaningful meetings - which was the real motivation for transiting in the US to begin with. ... In spite of what China and its yes-men in Taiwan would have the world believe, Chen is the president of this country. The reception accorded to him by another government is therefore a direct reflection on the standing of this nation. So, while Chen should not take this incident personally, we should. Taiwanese should feel saddened and humiliated that the president's humble request for transit stops that would allow him to speak to like-minded figures in the US were rejected. Under the circumstances, it is baffling that some people have seen this incident as a cause for celebration. ..."

D) "Chen's Woes Reveal Need for Some US Reflection"

Political Columnist Hu Wen-huei commented in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] (5/10):

"... In the past, the Chen administration's foreign policy has always been orientated toward the US. It should conduct a major rethink of its diplomatic orientation and go its own way. Given the international situation and Taiwan's predicament, the current and future Taiwan-US relationship is and will continue to be extremely important. Nevertheless, continued absolute reliance on the US will exact a price, as the US tends to look on Taiwan as a pawn in its game. Taiwan is expected to comply 100 percent with the US' commands, on pain of being put to rights either covertly or overtly. ...

"The smallest action on the part of the US has major repercussions in Taiwan: When the US coughs, Taiwan gets a cold. Chen's recent US transit episode was an example of Taiwan being caught off guard, and ending up a loser no matter what it did to resolve the situation. ... Without an international strategy and careful implementation, Taiwan will find it even harder to break out of its diplomatic isolation. Let's make sure this unusual incident is a one-off event, and that it never happens again."

E) "Suddenly, Chen Shui-bian Changes into an Anti-U.S. Frontrunner?"

The pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] editorialized (5/10):

"... In fact, the United States, when handling [Chen's] transits this time, had draw a clear line to separate 'U.S.-Taiwan relations' from 'U.S.-Bian relations.' Now Chen even went so far as to

describe the U.S. government's political penalty against him as 'Washington treating Taiwan as a lackey.' Chen's move has evidently and maliciously twisted the U.S. government's original meaning and deliberately incited the Taiwan people's hostility against the United States. As it stands now, [we] only saw how Chen has started to talk incoherently just to cover up his own mistakes and evade Washington's humiliation of him!

"The situation is very clear now: The United States will not destroy its relations with Taiwan just because of its discord with Chen. Nor is Chen able to dodge the responsibility that he should shoulder for the major setback of his handling 'Bian-U.S. relations' by using provocative sentences such as 'the United States treats Taiwan as a lackey.' In the wake of this uproar, the United States will remain intact despite Chen's protests, and the spine of Taipei-Washington ties will not be broken. Also, a majority of the Taiwan people will not hate or dislike the United States simply because of Chen's provocation. The one that is most badly hurt is Chen himself. ... In the face of such developments, the United States will start to question the credibility of the DPP and Taiwan independence activists. This is by no means an asset that Chen has created for the DPP and the Taiwan independence supporters, but a big disaster that can hardly be overcome! ..."

F) "Lackey ... Will [Chen] Become More Confrontational and Provocative in the Next Two Years?"

Professor Edward Chen of Tamkang University's Graduate Institute of American Studies opined in the pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] (5/10)

"... The United States has at least several purposes behind its decision to embarrass Chen Shui-bian, using his transit request: First, the United States sent two envoys to Taiwan to negotiate over the scrapping of the National Unification Council (NUC) early this year, but they returned without fulfilling their mission. This made Bush all the more determined to strengthen supervision of Chen's 'next step' following the NUC decision. ... Second, Bush intended to use this opportunity to show that when Taiwan jeopardized U.S. national interests using the name of democracy, Washington can definitely use diplomatic means to make Taiwan obey it. ... What worries the Taiwan people is whether Chen will use more confrontational and provocative remarks and behavior in the next two years to challenge the consensus reached by Bush and Chinese President Hu Jintao to prevent Taiwan independence. ... "

G) "Taiwan-U.S. Relations Walking a Tight Rope"

Professor Philip Yang of National Taiwan University's Department of Political Science opined in the pro-status quo "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] (5/10):

"... The uproar caused by [Chen's] transits mainly resulted from the fact that Washington has seen through Taipei's transit strategy - namely, Taipei hoped to reduce the domestic political pressure it suffered and finally resolve its interaction difficulties with Washington in the wake of the cessation of the National Unification Council (NUC) by using [Chen's] transits in the continental U.S. and warm support from Washington this time. But the United States did not want to offer what Taipei wished for. In particular, if Beijing interprets [Washington's allowing Chen's transits] as the United States showing support for the cessation of the NUC, it will alter the definition and balance of the cross-Straits status quo. Washington does not want to give Taipei the opportunity to use personal or domestic factors to manipulate Taipei-Washington relations and cross-Straits relations. It thus adopted preventive measures to avoid a crisis. ..."

H) "Mistakes Made by Chen in Transit Battle with U.S."

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (5/10):

"... By deciding to once again to bypass Anchorage and choose non-U.S. transit points on his way home, Chen apparently wanted to convey a message to the Bush government that he could do without the U.S. And by refusing to return through Alaska, Chen actually missed out on a good opportunity to meet and talk with U.S. officials that

would have helped ease relations strained by his earlier high-profile protest, paving the way for a fresh start on bilateral relations. Chen said yesterday in Costa Rica that his decision not to touch U.S. soil won't affect relations with Washington. No one would believe that. ... Washington, long fed-up with Chen's past manipulation of issues that threatened to undermine America's interests, would not allow him to get away with it so easily this time. The U.S. may likely separate Chen and his government from its relations with Taiwan. ...

"A third major mistake Chen made in negotiating his U.S. transit stops is that he equated his personal interests with national interests. Washington's unwillingness to give him better treatment was surely a grave political blow to him and his party. But this has nothing to do with Taiwan's national interests. If Chen really has Taiwan's interests in his heart, he should have never allowed himself to incessantly strain our most important U.S. relations by pursuing pro-independence policies, just for the sake of advancing partisan benefits."

YOUNG